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ABSTRACT

The number of part-time faculty instructors at two-year colleges has grown steadily since the early 1960s, increasing from 38% in 1962 to 65% in 1993. Part-time faculty are employed in community colleges for four main reasons. First, they save an institution money in both salaries and benefits and are rarely promoted; second, the use of part-time faculty increases institutional flexibility in matching the demands of varying enrollments; third, they bring real-world experience; and fourth, part-time faculty themselves benefit because working part-time adds prestige and fulfillment to their lives and can lead to full-time employment. There are disadvantages, however, to employing part-time faculty. Critics argue that they harm full-time faculty by taking away full-time positions and extra pay for course overloads. Critics also claim that part-timers themselves suffer as a result of their overuse for the delivery of instruction. A third reported disadvantage is that the integrity of the two-year college teaching profession is severely undermined, although there is no consensus on how or even if it is undermined. Some research has found that part-time faculty do not incorporate new teaching methods and are less effective teachers than full-time faculty, while other studies have found no differences. Contains 20 references. (HAA)

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Advantages and Disadvantages of Employing Part-Time Faculty in Community Colleges

by Grace Banachowski

Despite the historical role played by part-time instructors in community colleges, research on part-time faculty is relatively new. This article provides a brief review of the current literature on the topic of part-time faculty in community colleges. "It examines the growth of part-time faculty since 1960, and the advantages and disadvantages of using part-timers to deliver instruction.

Part-time Faculty as the Majority

The number of part-time faculty instructors at two-year colleges has grown steadily since the early 1960s. According to Lombardi (1992), part-time faculty constituted 38.5% of the instructors in 698 junior colleges in 1962. This number increased moderately to 40% in 1971, and three years later grew to nearly 50%. By 1980, nearly 60% of the faculty in two-year colleges were employed part-time, and 65% in 1993 (National Center for Education Statistics in American Association of Community Colleges, 1995). Clearly, community colleges rely heavily on part-time faculty for the delivery of instruction, and the trend is certain to continue.

Advantages to Employing Part-Time Faculty

Part-time faculty are employed in community colleges for a variety of reasons. First, part-time faculty save an institution money. Within an environment of shrinking financial resources, institutions of higher education are forced to seek alternative methods for delivering costly services (Avakian, 1995; Monroe & Denman, 1991). Adjunct faculty are less costly than full-time faculty in both salaries and benefits. They are paid one-third of the salary of full-time faculty, have limited rights to raises, and are rarely

promoted to higher-paid, more prestigious positions (Twigg, 1989).

Second, the use of part-time faculty in community colleges increases institutional flexibility in matching the demands of varying enrollments (Lankard, 1993; McGuire, 1993). Adjuncts are contracted to teach at the beginning of each term and must have their contracts renewed to teach each subsequent term. Therefore, when matriculation drops, the number of part-time faculty are easily adjusted by not renewing contracts.

Third, part-time faculty are advantageous because they bring "real world vocational experience" to the community college environment (Cline, 1993, p. 26). In other words, they enrich academic preparation for the professions (Phelan, 1986).

Fourth, part-time faculty themselves benefit from teaching part-time at community colleges. According to Reed (1985), "professionals in fields other than teaching are grateful for being able to teach part-time because of the prestige and fulfillment it adds to their work lives" (p. 40). Further, adjuncts see part-time work as a method by which to secure full-time employment (Silvers, 1990).

Disadvantages to Employing Part-Time Faculty

Although recent research suggests that the incentives for employing part-timers are obviously strong, critics contend that the costs of employing a majority of faculty on a part-time basis far outweigh any benefits. First, critics argue that increased use of part-time faculty harms full-time faculty by taking away full-time positions and extra pay for course overloads (Twigg, 1989).

Second, critics claim that part-timers themselves suffer as a result of

their overuse for the delivery of instruction. Monroe and Denman (1991) argue that part-time faculty roles are unclear and that as a result, adjunct faculty experience considerable role ambiguity. According to McGuire (1993), part-time faculty roles are unclear because "too often, colleges fail to integrate part-time faculty into their institutions" (p. 3).

Role ambiguity also makes part-timers vulnerable to exploitation. Part-time faculty have no guarantee of continued employment from term to term, no health insurance or other benefits, few raises or opportunities for promotions, and no voice in decisions that affect them (Twigg, 1989). These conditions can lead to frustration (Lankard, 1993).

A third reported disadvantage of employing a large number of part-timers is a concern that the integrity of the two-year college teaching profession is severely undermined. However, there is lack of consensus on how integrity is undermined. Some argue it leads to differentiated teaching services (Samuel, 1989; Thompson, 1992). Research suggests that part-timers rely on traditional pedagogy. Therefore, they often fail to incorporate new methods of teaching (Digranes & Digranes, 1995). Contradictory to the claim that part- and full-time faculty use different teaching methods, data drawn from national studies of professional development programs for two-year college faculty revealed that part-timers who engage in professional development activities use the same methods of teaching as full-timers (Impara, Hoerner, Clowes, and Alkins, 1991; Kelly, 1992).

Some research appears to conclude that part-timers are less effective teachers than are full-timers (Spangler, 1990). Yet, other studies conclude that

there are virtually no differences in the type or quality of instruction delivered by part- and full-time faculty. For example, the results of a study conducted by the Chancellor's Office of the California Community Colleges to examine current policies and practices regarding the use of part-time faculty in the California system, revealed inconclusive evidence regarding differences in the quality of instruction provided by full- and part-time faculty (California Community Colleges, 1987).

Discussion

A large proportion of the faculty at many community colleges teach part time. There are both advantages and disadvantages to employing part-time faculty for delivering instruction. The strongest disadvantage of using part-time faculty appears to be that they are less effective teachers than full-timers. However, studies that support the contention that part-timers are less (or for that matter more) effective teachers than full-timers are inconclusive. At this time, and until further evidence to the contrary, it seems that the advantages to employing part-timers may override the disadvantages.

Both Leslie and Gappa (1993) and Roueche, Roueche, and Milliron (1995) believe that integration of part-time faculty into college communities is not only possible, but necessary. In their respective books, both sets of authors offer recommended practices and models for integrating part-time faculty into community college organizational cultures. The perspective is that "institutions that employ part-time faculty strengthen themselves when they adopt a positive, fair, and investment-oriented stance toward their part-time faculty" (Leslie and Gappa, 1993, p. 289).

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